



NORTH DAKOTA
DEPARTMENT *of* HEALTH

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release:
August 1, 2007

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Department of Health Reports Increase in Illnesses Associated With Swimming in Lakes

BISMARCK, N.D. – Several cases of illnesses associated with swimming and other recreational water activities in lakes have been reported to the North Dakota Department of Health, according to Julie Goplin, epidemiologist with the department's Division of Disease Control

Several kinds of germs that cause diarrhea are naturally found in lakes and rivers. For example, cryptosporidium is a parasite that finds its way into water when excreted in feces of people and many species of animals, including cattle, sheep, rodents, cats, dogs and birds. Humans become infected by swallowing water contaminated with the parasite.

"Unfortunately, people don't often realize that lakes and rivers can contain germs that may make them sick," Goplin said. "It's very important that people don't swallow the water when swimming or water skiing."

Nineteen cases of cryptosporidiosis have been reported so far this year, compared to 11 this time last year. The majority of this year's cases occurred in June and July; of those, six people reported recently swimming in lakes in North Dakota. Children, pregnant women and people with weakened immune systems are at greatest risk of getting sick. Other germs that can cause infections from being in water include giardia, shigella and *E. coli*.

The following tips can help prevent water-related illnesses:

- Do not swallow lake or river water and avoid getting water in your mouth.
- Practice good hygiene by taking a shower before and after swimming and wash your hands after using the toilet or changing diapers.
- Make sure children don't go to the bathroom in the water by taking them on bathroom breaks often. Make sure they wash their hands properly.
- Do not swim when you have diarrhea. This is especially important for children in diapers. People diagnosed with cryptosporidium or giardia should avoid swimming for two weeks after diarrhea has ended.

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Visit the health department home page at www.ndhealth.gov.

For more information or to report a possible recreational water illness, contact Julie Goplin, North Dakota Department of Health, at 800.472.2180.

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